

Play policy

Tewkesbury C of E Primary School & Pre-School



Approved by:	Governing Body
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Where the terms 'organisation' or 'school' are used throughout this policy, they include Tewkesbury C of E School and Tewkesbury C of E Pre-School. They also include the school's own extended services of Breakfast Club and Afterschool Club.

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Tewkesbury Church of England Primary School (C of E) recognises that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood and is committed to using this policy in all decisions which will affect children's play.

1. Commitment

Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that:

"A child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts."

At Tewkesbury C of E, we are committed to using our school vision and this play policy to guide our planning and actions in providing play opportunities for children. Play helps create children who are independent, confident, imaginative, adaptable, social and able to assess risks. Our school believes that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. Wherever possible, play must not be restricted by weather conditions, age, or ability. We believe play provision should be welcoming and accessible to every child, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin or individual abilities.

In line with the **Children Act 1989 and 2004**, the **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974**, **Keeping Children Safe in Education (2026)**, and the **Equality Act 2010**, we acknowledge our duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, including providing safe and enriching play experiences.

All play provision will also adhere to the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, ensuring staff are vigilant and responsive to children's physical and emotional wellbeing.

There will be a named governor responsible for play/OPAL.

2. Rationale

Children spend up to 20%, or 1.4 years, of their time in school at play.

With better quality play opportunities, there are fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school and improved skills development and learning. As children improve their quality of play and have more enriching play times, there are fewer accidents and classroom learning is enhanced as children come in from play happy and ready to learn.

Better quality play leads to happier children and staff.

3. Definition of Play

The Government's Play Strategy defines play as:

"Encompassing children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children but also for the society in which they live."

This activity meets the four components of a child's development:

- **Physical:** direct impact on physical development, coordination, and fitness
- **Intellectual:** cognitive development, imagination
- **Educational:** knowledge and understanding of academic outcomes
- **Social:** development of values, beliefs, self-perception, and communication skills, leadership, and teamwork

At Tewkesbury C of E, we recognise that:

- Play allows children to be creative and cooperative.
- The adult's role in great play is to be responsive to children's invitations and requests.
- Play may be solitary or social.
- Play invites investigation and exploration which may test boundaries.
- Play is something you choose to do and is fun!

4. Risks and Benefits

Our role as play providers is to facilitate the maximum number of enriching opportunities for children to encounter. Children need to learn to manage risk for themselves in an environment that is as safe as it needs to be, rather than completely devoid of risk.

Many research studies have found that the social, physical, and mental benefits to children of managed risks are vast. Children become more resilient, adaptable, and eager to try new experiences. They should be provided with opportunities to challenge themselves and experience successes and failures. Risk and challenge are not limited to physical risk – they include the uncertainties involved in making new friends, playing with children from different backgrounds, and building emotional resilience through trying out new experiences with the possibility of failure.

When we carry out risk assessments, the benefit to children of challenging play opportunities should be balanced with any potential risk. We will adopt a risk-benefit approach and use dynamic risk assessments to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's needs.

Dynamic assessments are supported by regular site safety checks carried out by staff and recorded by the Site Manager to ensure ongoing safety of the play environment.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) offers guidance on the provision of play in educational settings and states that:

"HSE fully supports the provision of play for all children in a variety of environments. HSE understands and accepts that this means children will often be exposed to play environments which, whilst well managed, carry a degree of risk and sometimes potential dangers." (HSE, 2013)

5. The Adult's Role in Play

All staff are fully committed to working with children to provide the play experiences that they want and need in their school. We will have a continuing dialogue with children about the play provision in the playground through regular play assemblies, School Council involvement, surveys, and other pupil voice outlets.

Staff will receive regular training in dynamic risk assessment and safeguarding protocols, ensuring they can identify and respond to potential risks promptly while facilitating enriching play experiences. The school is working with OPAL (www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk) to guide a strategic approach to developing play at Tewkesbury C of E. In addition, the C of E Play Team will work with parents, teachers, teaching assistants, Midday Supervisors (MDSs), and all other staff to implement the changes highlighted in this policy.

Teaching assistants and MDSs will take on the role of Play Makers. They will ensure the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available to children. They will observe, reflect, and analyse the play that is happening and select a mode of intervention or make a change to the play space if needed. Play Makers ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way.

All staff will be expected to adopt a ‘heads-up’ approach when patrolling their area alongside undertaking dynamic risk management. Staff should keep their area free of hazards and litter and communicate any maintenance issues promptly. Supervising staff need to understand their area, know who is playing in it, what they are playing with, and how risky their play is. The walkie-talkie should be used to support communication when supervising the free-range play.

6. Children’s Role in Play

Children will have access to their own version of the play policy (Appendix 1), which includes their rights and responsibilities:

- Take responsibility for their play and outdoor learning experiences.
- Respect and look after each other, their environment, equipment, and toys.
- Be aware of sanctions surrounding purposely dangerous or unsafe behaviour, or not observing equipment rules/expectations.
- Make sure that playtimes are fun for everybody.

This children’s policy will be shared and explained to all children regularly as part of ongoing assemblies, discussions, and dialogue in class and with the School Council.

7. The Environment

At Tewkesbury C of E, we will:

- Use the outdoor space as a natural resource for learning and playing, encouraging children to value natural or found objects for play.
- Include children when planning for playing and learning outdoors.
- Ensure that the outdoor area offers all children the opportunity to investigate, take risks, and explore using their imagination and creativity.
- Expect children to respect the outdoor environment and care for living things.
- Give children the opportunity to manage the space and freedom afforded by the outdoors.
- Enrich the quality of the environment to maximise play types and increase play value.
- Ensure that the playground is an integrated area where all children from Pre-school to Year 6 can play safely.
- Teach children their responsibilities with regard to maintaining the quality of their outdoor space and the equipment available and ensure they take an active part in doing this.
- Promote children's pride in the outdoor space that belongs to them.
- Where possible, source play materials sustainably and reuse or repurpose resources to model environmental responsibility.

Appendix 1: Children's Play Policy

We have the right to have fun at playtimes. We have the responsibility to make sure that everyone has fun and our play does not stop this.

We have the right to make our own decisions about our play and choose what we do. We have the responsibility to make sure our decisions don't affect others in a negative way.

We have the right to choose who we play with. We have the responsibility to ensure no one is left out of play or forced to do something they don't want to.

We have the right to play with lots of different toys and have a well-looked-after environment. We have the responsibility to take pride in, respect, and look after our environment and toys.

We have the right to explore, be creative, and take thoughtful risks. We have the responsibility to think about what we are doing and talk to a Play Maker about the risks we are taking.